

Felix Gonzalez-Torres

"Untitled" (Perfect Lovers). 1991

Illustrated on page 497

Deborah Cullen, *Latin American & Caribbean Art: MoMA at El Museo, 2004*, page 141

Gonzalez-Torres used simple, common materials—often readymades composed of mass-produced items—to create intimate works about memory, loss, love, and sexuality. His work was seen as potently political yet subtle and very personal. Informed by a brand of gentle, humanistic conceptualism, Gonzalez-Torres employed a latterday Minimalist language in the service of a somewhat activist liberal agenda. His work was generous, engaging the viewer in his projects. He became internationally renowned for poignant public billboards, humble images (a hand, a bed, clouds) that evoked social commentary without didacticism; his most revered installations consisted of stacks of offset prints, or piles of foil-wrapped candies to which spectators could help themselves. During a time of raging debates over identity and sexuality, and of fury over the lack of action to fight the devastating AIDS pandemic, Gonzalez-Torres's work was provocative, sincerely emotional, and intelligent. It was poetic yet coolly urbane, and a part of its deeply felt resonance was perhaps due to the human warmth and romantic space for possibility that it offered in angry times. . . .

Gonzalez-Torres's works were economical in means yet profoundly moving. *"Untitled" (Perfect Lovers)* (1987–90, 1991),¹ for example, comprises two identical, abutting, battery-operated, black-and-white Seth Thomas clocks. The neutral units of measure are transformed through their redundancy and composition into a meditation on human connection, mortality, and time's savage inevitability. The work evokes two human heads—perhaps of the same sex—nuzzling together as fleeting minutes tick past. Andrea Miller-Keller has described the work as "a metaphor for two bodies and souls linked by love who understand that at some future date one will 'run down' before the other. . . . The regulation black rim around each clock takes on new meaning when the clocks are understood in this context: the rim becomes a black border signifying that mourning and grief are unavoidable in the natural ebb and flow of life. . . . Not incidentally, their black outlines together combine to form an infinity sign."²